

The parallel economy: The right-wing movement creating a safe haven for deplatformed conservative influencers

April 14 2023, by Jing Zeng and Daniela Mahl



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

The last few years have seen the west swept by political polarization, much of which has played out online. Debates around race, gender and freedom of speech have splintered democracies, spread conspiracy theories and sparked a series of culture wars. One byproduct of this is a

right-wing movement in the tech and economic spaces, known as the "parallel economy".

The parallel economy is a system of financial services, e-commerce websites and social media targeting communities with right-wing political values, mainly in the US and Europe. Boasting taglines like "[America's first credit card for Conservatives](#)" and "[Save America. stop funding woke corporations](#)", these services aim to circumvent or compete with mainstream financial institutions and tech.

Historically, the term [parallel economy](#) has been used alongside concepts like the "shadow" or "underground" economy, referring to an unsanctioned economic sector operating outside of official channels and eluding GDP estimates.

But now, both in the US and Europe, the term has become a catchall to describe a resistance movement against what some sections of the political right view as the "woke" economy. In other words, business and [financial systems](#) that prioritize progressive social causes and are often associated with the political left.

In our research into the parallel economy platforms [BitChute](#) and [Gab](#), we found that users of these platforms feel a duty and responsibility to expose the "uncensored truth". They see themselves as a counter-voice to mainstream sites, working to ensure free and unrestricted speech.

Advocates for the parallel economy view [mainstream media](#) and tech firms as oppressors of conservative voices. In response, they are creating and supporting alternative platforms that align with their conservative values. These include e-commerce, social media, credit cards and even [dating apps](#).

This phenomenon is not exclusive to the US. The video platform

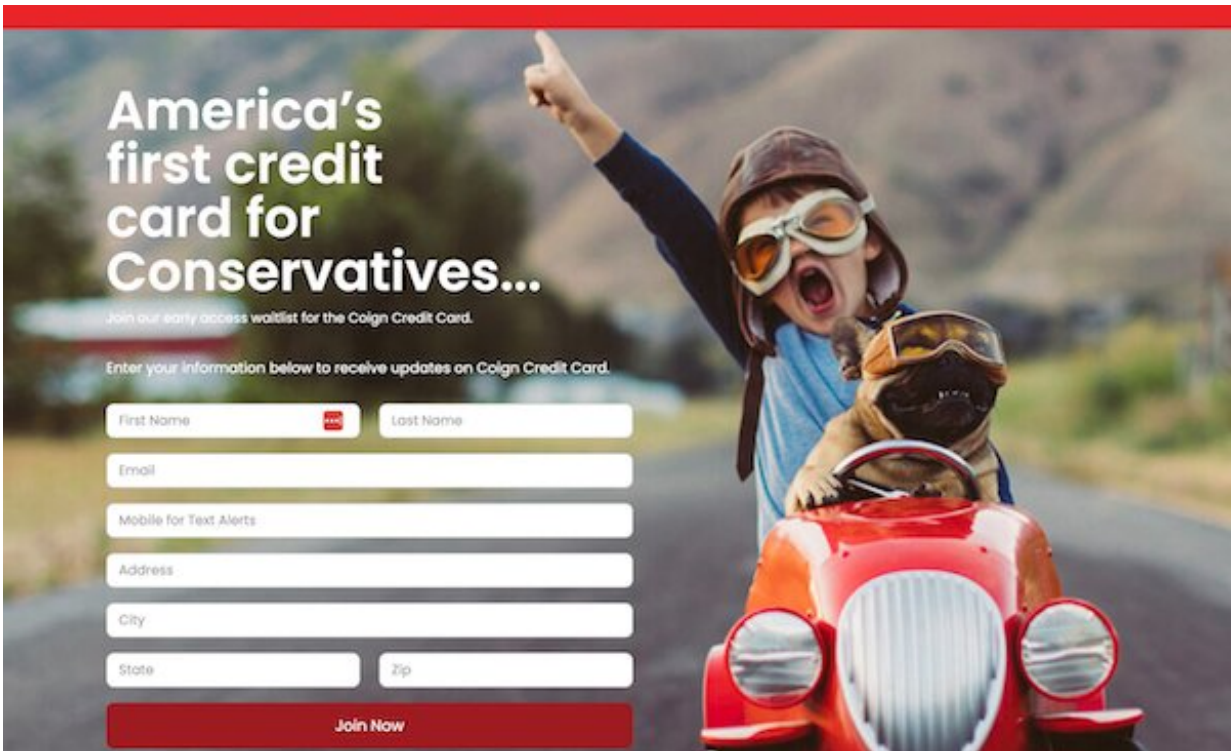
BitChute was founded in the UK, and other examples have emerged in [Ireland](#), [Switzerland](#), [Germany](#) and elsewhere.

Financial preppers (people who take proactive measures to prepare for [financial crises](#)), [small business owners](#) and other internet entrepreneurs have joined the movement to promote their own products and services. While it is difficult to measure the full reach of the parallel economy, [data suggests](#) that alternative social media alone is attracting tens of millions of users.

Deplatformed and demonetized

The parallel economy provides a perceived "safe haven" and offers new [monetisation opportunities](#) for content creators who have felt silenced—or been sanctioned—on mainstream platforms.

Like all content creators, conservative influencers rely on social media to remain relevant, influential and profitable. This can be through subscription revenue, viewer donations, ads or selling merchandise.



Coign promotes itself as a ‘credit card for Conservatives’. Credit: Coign, Author provided

Some platforms, such as YouTube, provide a formal infrastructure to help creators monetize. The [YouTube Partner Program](#) has been a vital revenue source for content creators, including some [conspiracy theorists and extremists](#).

Under intense pressure from regulators and advertisers, YouTube has begun [demonetising](#) problematic videos. This means banning users from the ad revenue sharing program altogether, although demonetised creators and their content may still be visible to users. Some platforms, including YouTube, have also stepped up efforts to remove content creators entirely for violating rules around sexual content, harassment or misinformation.

This is where "alt-tech" platforms come in. Self-proclaimed free speech advocates have launched a number of alternative platforms, providing refuge to the deplatformed. If someone is banned from YouTube, they can now turn to Rumble or BitChute.

Rumble, a Canadian company, has become home to numerous "mega influencers" considered controversial or who have been deplatformed by major [social media](#) platforms. These include former US president [Donald Trump](#) and misogyny influencer [Andrew Tate](#).

American Conservative commentator [Stew Peters](#) used Rumble to release his viral COVID-19 "documentary" [Died Suddenly](#). The hour-long video, which has nearly 18 million views, links unexpected deaths to vaccinations and promotes a number of debunked conspiracy theories.

Making money in the parallel economy

As alt-tech platforms grow in popularity, established technology companies have increasingly denied them access to their services (app stores, payment processors). This is a process known as "[deplatformisation](#)". PayPal has deplatformed several conservative alt-tech platforms [including Gab](#), known as the free speech Twitter alternative. In response, Gab launched its own payment processor, [GabPay](#), to enable financial transactions with and between users.

Platforms such as BitChute and Gab encourage users to support their content creators through donations or tipping. Rumble has also acquired Locals, an online service that allows creators to generate subscription-based income.

Content creators and users can also promote and sell products, such as health supplements and alternative medicine, on many alt-tech platforms. Gab has established an in-[platform](#) marketplace for this

purpose. These opportunities provide [content creators](#) with a source of income, while also allowing users to support the creators and products they believe in, outside of mainstream corporate influence.

American conservative political commentator Jeremy Boreing is a vocal advocate for the parallel economy. As the co-founder of Conservative news website The Daily Wire, Boreing encouraged his readers to spend money not just on his [online media](#), but on "anti-woke" shaving products and chocolate.

The parallel [economy](#) capitalizes on a sense of ideological victimhood that many on the political right are feeling. This message is at the heart of Boreing's [plea to readers](#): "Stop giving your money to corporations that hate you."

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